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A STUDY OF SOME PROBLEMS
OF
NEW HOME DEMONSTRATION AGENTS
IN
THE CENTRAL STATES

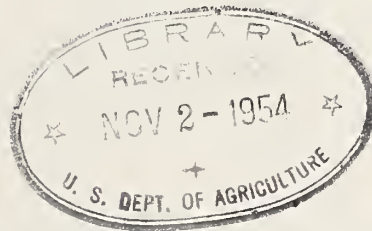
An Abstract of a Report

by

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District Home Agent

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Duplicated by Federal Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture

823(8-54)

DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

Completed questionnaires were returned from 39 home demonstration agents. They represented five Illinois, seven Indiana, eight Kansas, six Minnesota, three Missouri, four Nebraska, one Ohio and five Wisconsin counties. These agents were in their first extension jobs; however, nearly three-fourths of them had had some previous work experience.

Age and Marital Status.

The age of the girls questioned ranged from 21 years to 43 years with 22 as the median age. 67.5% of the total group were in the 22-25 year range with 25% of the total being 22.2 years. 15% were 23 years, 15% were 25 years and 12.5% were 24 years.

Thirty-one of the girls were single and eight were married.

Education, Experience and Training.

Twenty-eight of the girls reported that they had lived on a farm. Fifteen of these had spent from 18 to 20 years there. Only two of those who had not lived on a farm reported no previous close association with rural people. The others had had previous experience in rural communities through school teaching, visiting relatives or living in small towns that were primarily rural in nature.

The entire group held bachelor's degrees from college with three reporting master's degrees. In addition to these three there were four others who had done some graduate work.

21 (53.9%) of the 39 agents reporting had had experience in the home economics profession prior to taking their current position. This group was composed of 15 teachers, 2 dietitians, 2 demonstrators and one associate extension agent. The remaining number included four teachers in fields other than home economics, seven girls experienced in office work and seven with no previous work experience. 17.9% of the total sample were completely inexperienced agents and 82.1% of the total reported some previous work experience.

TABLE I. Experience of agents prior to current extension job

<u>Type of experience</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Inexperienced agents	7	17.9
Experienced agents	32	82.1
Home economics careers	21	53.9
Teachers in other fields	4	10.3
Total teachers	19	48.7
Office workers	7	17.9

At the time of replying to the questionnaire the agents had been in their present extension jobs from 1 to 13 months. The median number was 7 months.

4 of the 39 reporting were associate agents. The one questionnaire which was not returned was also sent to an associate agent.

The agents were asked to check school training, other than the usual home economics subject matter, that they had taken and indicate that which was proving most helpful on the job. Methods of teaching, understanding child behavior, and working with groups were the areas in which training had been taken by the largest numbers. Methods of teaching, working with groups, recreation and newswriting were chosen as proving the most helpful to the girls who had taken them.

This material will be found in Table II.

TABLE II. School Training other than Home Economics Subject Matter

<u>Subjects in which school trained</u>	<u>Number taking</u>	<u>Number considering it most helpful</u>
Methods of teaching	33	15
Understanding child behavior	33	10
Working with groups	30	15
Understanding cultural backgrounds	29	7
Recreation	23	12
Newswriting	21	14
Planning programs	21	9
Keeping financial records	19	2
Radio	17	7
Office management	11	4

The most common methods of professional training that were used for the agents in this sample were individual help from the supervisor, conferences for new agents and a training period with another agent. Less than one-half reported having taken extension agent courses in school but three-fourths of the agents had spent some time in training with another home demonstration agent. Six of the group reported summer school and four had had workshop experience.

TABLE III Professional Training

<u>Type of training</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Individual help from supervisor	36	94.9
Conference for new agents	31	79.3
Training with another agent	30	77.0
Individual help from specialist	26	66.6
Extension courses in school	18	46.1
Summer school courses	6	15.4
Training period in state office	4	10.3
Workshops	4	10.3

Church fellowship groups were checked most frequently among organizations belonged to prior to becoming an agent. 94.9% reported belonging to a church group, 60% had been former 4-H club members. 51.3% belonged to a sorority and 36% were former Girl Scouts. The mean number of such groups belonged to by each girl was 6; the lowest being 2 and the highest, 20.

In checking responsibilities assumed in these groups, 34 of the 39 girls had acted as committee chairman, 32 had held the office of president and 30 had been secretaries. Other leadership positions held included 22 vice-presidents, 18 reporters, and 14 club leaders or counselors.

In addition to these responsibilities the girls had had experience in giving talks, leading discussions, conducting group meetings, giving demonstrations, etc., before they started their extension jobs. Giving talks was an experience of 94.9% and newswriting was checked by 51.3%.

TABLE IV Group Experiences Prior to Becoming a Home Agent

<u>Experienced</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Giving talks	36	94.9
Leading discussions	32	82.0
Conducting group meetings	31	79.5
Giving demonstrations	31	79.5
Writing news stories	20	51.3
Leading singing	20	51.3

District Organization.

The boundaries of the districts or supervisory areas coincide for agriculture, home economics and 4-H club work in all but one of the eight States studied.

The number of counties in the eight districts represented in the sample ranged from 19 through 40 with the median number falling at 27. The median number of home demonstration agents per district supervisor was 24, representing a range from 18 to 39. (Table V.)

TABLE V		Size of Supervisory Districts						
	<u>Ill.</u>	<u>Ind.</u>	<u>Kans.</u>	<u>Minn.</u>	<u>Mo.</u>	<u>Nebr.</u>	<u>Ohio</u>	<u>Wisc.</u>
No. counties supervised	19	31	38	29	24	40	22	20
No. agents in counties	18	29	38	24	24	25	22	20
No. assistant agents	0	2	2	0	0	1	0	1

The training in all the States is organized so that it includes a state-wide conference for all newly appointed agents at some time during the year. Six of the States provide training for all agents, home demonstration, agricultural and 4-H together. One reported separate conferences for the home demonstration agents and one reported that both methods were used irregularly as needed.

All of the States follow the practice of training the new agent for a period of time in a county with an experienced agent. The amount of time spent on training varies according to the previous experience of the new agent, demand for positions to be filled and funds available for training. Length of time in trainer counties ranged from none to three or more months. The most common pattern for this sample was 1-2 months in a trainer county.

Five of the eight States reported that they had a written plan for in-service training; one reported that the plan was being revised and the others had no formal written plan. These plans all contain detailed outlines for the use of the beginning agent in her apprenticeship. One also included a plan for the trainer agent to follow. Each plan suggested techniques for becoming acquainted with the organization and policies of the Cooperative Extension Service, the county and its program, preparing and carrying out plans of work, office procedures, and the duties and responsibilities as well as the privileges of county extension workers.

The supervisors reported that they visit their new agents during the first month on the job and give individual help as needed thereafter.

All States reported that specialists train the new agents in subject matter fields as the need arises. Six of the eight trained groups of new agents in some areas by themselves. These were usually subject matter fields with which the other agents were already familiar. They also reported training new agents in groups with experienced agents as the necessity for information arose in other fields.

SUMMARY

This has been a study of the induction of home demonstration agents in eight central States. The purposes of the study were to determine what the foremost problems of newly-appointed agents are; the degrees of difficulty experienced with the various problems; and the sources of help used in solving the problems.

The list of problems was arrived at through free-answer correspondence with eight new Kansas agents. These answers were categorized by the writer into five areas: Getting Acquainted, Managing an Office, Reporting, Program and Organization and Management of Time. A questionnaire was prepared and submitted to 40 newly appointed agents in eight central States. Degrees of difficulties for problems in each category were checked by the agents as much, some, little or none.

I. PROBLEMS.

The most difficult problems met in each area are listed below:

A. Getting Acquainted.

1. Learning the highways and the rural roads.
2. Learning about work done in the county in previous years.
3. Remembering names.
4. Finding associates outside the extension field.

Remembering names was the problem in this area that was continuing to give difficulty.

B. Managing an Office.

1. Learning about the various forms and handbooks.
2. Learning what to file and discard.
3. Training and using an office secretary.

Use of the secretary was the most persistent of these three although not rated as creating the most difficulty.

C. Reporting.

1. Collecting data from statistical questionnaires.
2. Writing narrative reports.
3. Classifying the various activities.

The first problem was the most difficult for the agents when they encountered it, but the latter ones continued to give difficulty longer.

D. Program and Organization.

1. Learning the general policies of the Extension Service.
2. Encouraging poorer clubs to do better work.

The latter situation was reported most often as remaining difficult. The general area of Program and Organization ranked above the other areas in the amount of difficulty that it gave the newly-appointed workers.

E. Management of Time.

1. Finding time for farm and home visits.
2. Arranging for adequate time for preparation for meetings, programs, demonstrations, etc.

The second of these problems continued to be a difficult situation.

II. SOURCES OF HELP.

County staff members were turned to for help in all five areas more often than any other source. District supervisors rated second to the county staff as a source of help and were most often sought for in the problems of Program and Organization.

In addition to these sources, home agents in other counties, lay leaders and specialists were consulted. They were asked for help in the area of Program and Organization more than in the other areas.

Help from other extension agents was considered the most effective type of assistance in the areas of Getting Acquainted and Managing an Office. In the areas of Reporting, Program and Organization and Time Management visits from the supervisor were the type of assistance considered the most helpful by the agents.

CONCLUSIONS

In view of the findings in this report the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The sample was a representative cross section of home demonstration agents being hired in the central states but contained too few completely inexperienced agents to draw any conclusions about their behavior as compared to the others. Lack of previous work experience did seem to be a greater factor in the degrees of difficulty experienced with early problems than professional training given for the extension job.
2. Most of the problems that create difficulties the first few months in the county are problems of administration, becoming familiar with the structural organization, channels of communication, etc. rather than of a technical subject matter nature.
3. The county staff was turned to for help more often than any other source; however, it rated second to the supervisor in effectiveness in three of the five areas. This seems to indicate (a) that the staff in the county is turned to first because of proximity and convenience, and (b) that is is one of the most important sources of security for the new agent.
4. Individual assistance given in visits by the supervisor may be more effective than that from any other source in the areas of Program and Organization, Time Management and Reporting. Agents tended to feel more secure in help from a person of higher status and with specialized knowledge when confronted with problems of organization.
5. The correlation between the requests for help from the county staff in getting acquainted and the effectiveness of the assistance being given indicates that they are probably the best source of help for problems in that area.
6. Failure to seek the help of leaders may indicate that they are not being involved in the agent's activities as early as they might be. This may be due to a number of factors, e.g. a poor introduction to the county, a lack of knowledge of the extension philosophy in the use of leaders, tradition in the county or lack of time to become well enough acquainted with the leaders to place confidence in them.
7. Evidence showing that reports are a continuing problem seems to indicate a need for training all agents in better methods of evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the viewpoint of the writer these recommendations seem advisable:

1. The role of the county staff should be emphasized in the in-service training programs as well as that of the trainer agents in other counties. Agricultural agents should be given some guidance in how to help new home agents when they come to their counties.
2. Visits by the supervisor to the new agent should include an office conference with the entire county staff whenever possible. The use of regular office conferences should be emphasized for effective organization and communication in the county office.
3. More use of lay leadership should be encouraged in the area of Getting Acquainted, thus shifting some of this responsibility from the county agents and also involving more people in the county. Since the Advisory Groups or Committees are a continuing organization of lay leaders and the first leaders with whom the new agent is associated, they should be trained in how to help new agents in an effective introduction to the county situation.
4. The new agents and experienced agents should be given help in evaluation and writing of reports. This might be done through a general conference of agents with individual assistance for new agents as needed.
5. This study should be followed with an analysis of inservice training programs and the effectiveness of the training methods used by both the county staff and the supervisor.

TABLE VI

PROBLEMS FOR WHICH 1/3 OR MORE TURNED TO THE COUNTY STAFF FOR HELP

Problem	Number asking help
<u>Getting Acquainted</u>	
1. Learning about the highways and rural roads.	32
2. Learning about work done in the county in other ways.	30
3. Learning about community facilities	26
4. Finding suitable living quarters	23
5. Getting acquainted with merchants and businessmen	23
6. Learning about community customs, standards, etc.	22
7. Finding a person to talk problems over with	21
8. Getting along with a few "problem" people	21
9. Feeling of being accepted as "one" of the extension workers	14
<u>Managing an Office</u>	
1. Learning what to file and discard	22
2. Understanding the franking privilege	21
3. Learning about the various forms and handbooks	17
4. Training and using an office secretary	14
<u>Reporting</u>	
1. Collecting data for statistical questionnaires	19
2. Learning how to report various events	17
3. Learning how to write narrative reports	14
<u>Program and Organization</u>	
1. Learning policies for cooperation with other agencies	25
2. Finding out what the county program is and how it works	23
3. Setting up leader training meetings	19
4. Encouraging poorer clubs to do better work	18
5. Learning general operational policies of Extension	16
6. Knowing position in relation to county advisory groups	16
7. Helping groups obtain leaders	16
8. Getting information for future county programs.	16
<u>Managing Time</u>	
1. Making a plan of work for the calendar year	14

TABLE VII

PROBLEMS FOR WHICH 1/3 OR MORE TURNED TO THE SUPERVISOR FOR HELP

Problem	Number asking help
<u>Getting Acquainted</u>	
1. Finding a person to talk problems over with	17
<u>Managing an Office</u>	
1. Planning with the other extension agents	15
2. Learning about the various forms and handbooks	15
<u>Reporting</u>	
1. Learning how to report various events	15
2. Learning how to write narrative reports	15
<u>Program and Organization</u>	
1. Learning general operational policies of Extension	26
2. Getting information for planning future programs	20
3. Learning about programs of related organizations such as ACWW, State and National HD Councils	16
4. Feeling that should be doing something with women of the county but not knowing what.	15
5. Knowing position in relation to county advisory groups	14
6. Learning policies for cooperation with other agencies.	13
<u>Managing Time</u>	
1. Making a plan of work for the calendar year	21

TABLE VIII

PROBLEMS FOR WHICH 1/3 OR MORE TURNED TO ANOTHER HOME AGENT FOR HELP

Problem	Number asking help
<u>Getting Acquainted</u>	
1. Finding a person to talk problems over with	13
<u>Program and Organization</u>	
1. Learning about programs of related organizations such as ACWW, State and National Home Demonstration Councils	15

TABLE IX

PROBLEMS FOR WHICH LAY LEADERS WERE MOST OFTEN ASKED FOR HELP

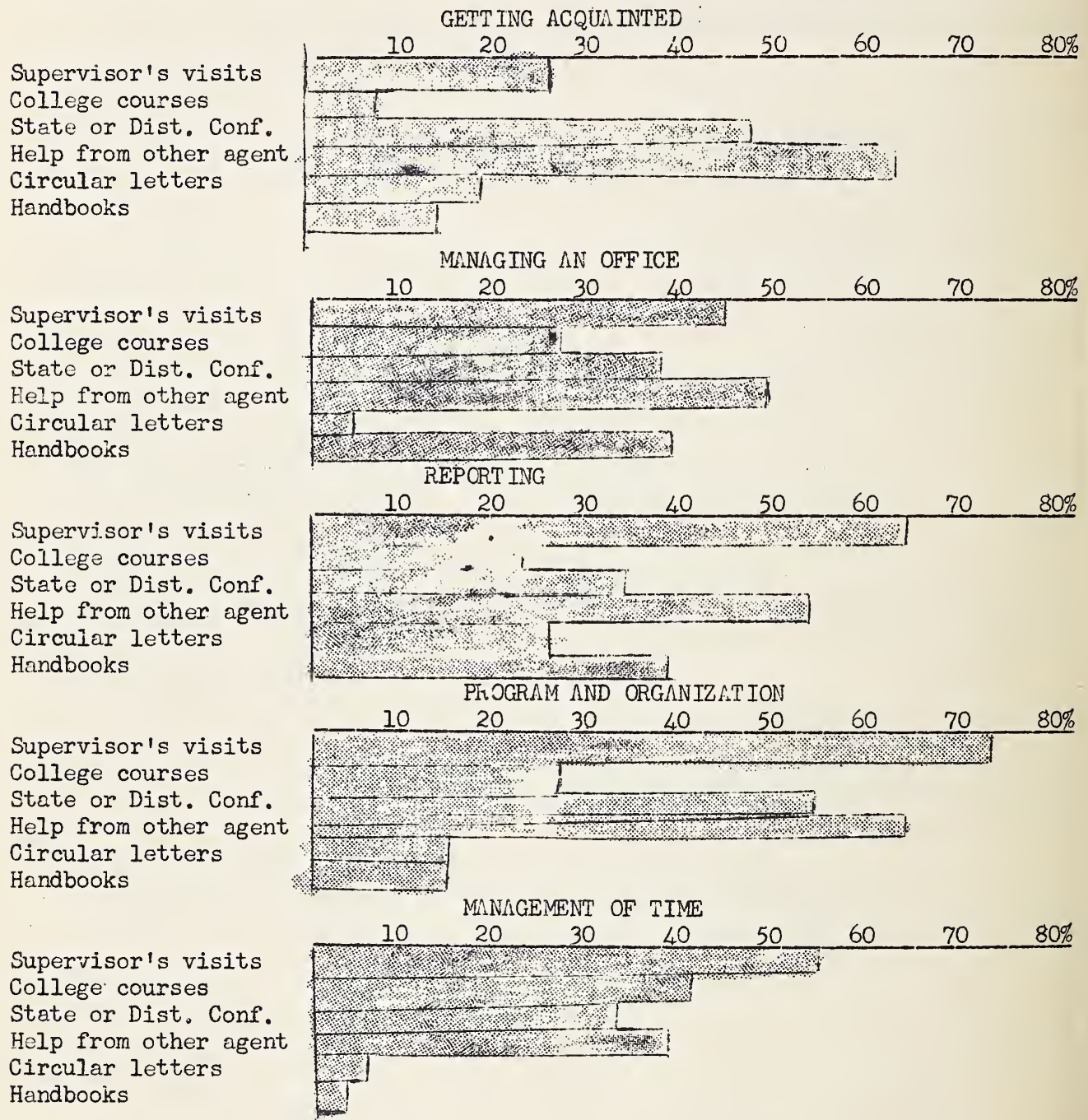
Problem	Number asking help
<u>Program and Organization</u>	
1. Finding out what the county program is and how it works.	14
2. Helping groups obtain leaders	9
3. Getting information for planning future programs	9
<u>Getting Acquainted</u>	
1. Learning about work done in county in other years	10
2. Learning about community facilities	9

TABLE X

PROBLEMS FOR WHICH SPECIALISTS WERE MOST OFTEN ASKED FOR HELP

Problems	Number asking help
<u>Program and Organization</u>	
1. Setting up leader training meetings	9
2. Correlating college training with subject matter from specialists	9

Figure F. Percentage of Sample Considering These Types of Assistance Most Helpful in Each Area





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